



## CATAWBA COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

---

P.O. Box 385 100-A South West Boulevard Newton, North Carolina 28658-0389  
[www.catawbacountync.gov](http://www.catawbacountync.gov)

Telephone: 828-464-5241

### *The 7 Key Types of Holiday Scams to Watch Out For This Christmas Season*

---

Despite the economic downturn, Internet shopping may well hit record levels this holiday season, opening the door to a host of both new and well practiced holiday scams.

But scammers are going to be busy, not just on the Internet but at the mall, at the airport, at the register and even at your front door.

It's bonanza time for them, as they take advantage of the seasonal hustle and bustle.

Last year, we produced our list of the [Top 5 Christmas Season Scams](#). We recommend you check that out again for some useful pointers and tips.

But even in the 12 months since then, things have moved on. Internet fraud and identity theft have become even more widespread, and tricksters out on Main Street and Your Street have become sharper than ever.

We've grouped this year's list of holiday scams under 7 headings -- for the areas you're most likely to encounter the crooks.

#### ***1. Internet holiday scams***

**The main scam:** It was our Number One holiday scam last time but now it's bigger than ever. By far the fastest-growing online holiday scam is the setting up of bogus websites offering just about everything you could want for Christmas, especially those hard to find gifts, at fantastic bargain prices.

You do a search for a gift you're planning to buy and suddenly you find it way cheaper than you had imagined. The website sales page looks professional, often bristling with testimonials from supposedly satisfied customers and logos suggesting top-line security.

These sites are easy to set up and the number has mushroomed in the past year, hosted all over the world.

As we previously warned, scammers will not only take your money for something they won't send you, they could also use your credit card details to buy other stuff for themselves and your personal details for identity theft.

**How to avoid it:** Don't trust a site or name you don't know -- check them out. Don't fall for prices that are too good to be true -- they usually are. Use a one-time card number available from some credit card companies to protect your financial details.

**Also watch out for:** Phony ads on auction sites; eGreetings card links that take you to a bogus site or download malware onto your computer; overpriced items or flashy illustrations that lead you to think they're higher quality or better products than they really are; counterfeit designer label products.

## ***2. Charity-related holiday scams***

**The main scam:** Holidays are just the best time for scammers to tug on our heartstrings. And the most likely place you'll encounter them is when they rattle a collection box in front of you either as you do your shopping or at your front door.

They may use all kinds of props to fool you, wearing seasonal costumes, dressed in familiar uniforms, wearing badges or carrying some other kind of bogus authorization. Often too, scammers use kids to convince you they're genuine.

**How to avoid it:** If you don't have time to check out how genuine the collector is, simply don't give. If you want to help them, find the charity name and donate directly. Look for Salvation Army and other collectors actually inside stores -- they're a safer bet.

**Also watch out for:** Telephone solicitations (how can you possibly know the caller is who they say they are, and why on earth would you give them your credit card number?) and sellers at your doorstep who show you a charity catalog, take your money and never come back.

## ***3. Holiday scams in the mall***

**The main scam:** Crowds mean rich rewards for pickpockets. If they steal your wallet, they'll have not only your money but also your credit cards and personal information that could lead to identify theft.

With a quick bump or, more often these days, a distraction from an accomplice, they can remove your wallet from your pocket or purse in seconds.

But why stop there? They'll take any accessible gift from your shopping bags too.

**How to avoid it:** Keep your wallet inside a closed purse or in a pocket with your hand on it. Leave non-essential identifying information and spare credit cards at home. Return frequently with gifts to your car and lock them out of sight in the trunk. If someone calls for your attention, protect your possessions first.

**Also watch out for:** Charity collectors as mentioned above; people hovering around you as you pay; temporary stores or booths whose operators may disappear after Christmas, leaving you unable to return goods; offers of "cheap" items from someone who approaches you in the parking lot.

## ***4. Holiday scams at the cash register***

**The mains scams:** Actually, there are two here, depending on which side of the counter you're standing.

If you're a shopper, beware of being short-changed, either intentionally or unintentionally. Both are easy to do in the frantic atmosphere at the cash register at this time of year.

And if you're the cashier, beware the flimflam, in which the scammer gives you a high-value bill then tries to change it for a smaller one and generally messes around until you lose track of what's going on. Again, there's often an accomplice.

**How to avoid them:** Have a fairly clear idea of the total cost before you go to the register and, if you can't make the right money, know what size of bill you'll use and how much change to expect. Don't move away from the register until you've checked your change and your receipt.

If you're a cashier, simply don't allow yourself to be pressured at the register. If you feel yourself getting confused, call a halt and, if necessary, call a supervisor.

**Also watch out for:** Sleight of hand, where the person you're paying switches your high value bill for a lower one and complains you haven't given enough cash; some of your purchased items are not placed in the store bag; the cashier doesn't return your credit card; forged \$20 bills; people (pickpockets) standing too close to you in line.

## ***5. Holiday scams in your home***

**The main scam:** Well, as mentioned above, bogus charity collectors may come knocking at your door this festive season. But one of the newer scams seen this year that's likely to take advantage of Christmas activities is the "parcel-waiting" trick.

You get a card through your door saying an unsuccessful attempt was made to deliver a package to your home and that you should call a particular number for more details.

You might reasonably be expecting a parcel at this time of year, so you call the number and get a recorded message or music that keeps you on the line for a while.

In fact, you've connected to a premium line or overseas service, which will be charged at exorbitant rates on your next phone bill, like the [809 scam](#).

Or you may be asked to provide personal information that could be used for identity theft, or to give information that would let a thief know when you're going to be out.

**How to avoid it:** Check the name of the company on the Internet. Also check online lists of overseas phone codes. If the number is not a 1-800 or local call, it may well be a scam. Don't give out personal details over the phone to someone you don't know, and don't tell them when you're going to be away from your home.

**Also watch out for:** Unexpected checks that arrive just in time for your shopping (they're bogus and will be accompanied by a request for you to forward part of the cash in a Money gram); products arrive that you didn't order (you'll be contacted later by someone who asks you to forward it -- it's probably stolen and you're the middle-person).

## ***6. Holiday scams out and about***

**The main scam:** The holiday season is just about the most popular time for special events -- shows, sports, concerts and other events -- so it's a great opportunity for ticket forgers or bogus ticket sales.

These often show up online (auction and classified type ads), in newspapers and, in the case of forged tickets, outside the venue itself.

**How to avoid it:** Ideally, buy only from venues or recognized agencies. If you do buy from an individual, get their phone number and home address and check them out. If you can, find out where they work. Check online and with the venue if there have been any reports of forged or bogus sales.

**Also watch out for:** If you're traveling, beware of some of the airport and travel scams we've covered in previous Scambusters articles.

[The 5 Most Common Types of Airport Scams and How to Avoid Them](#)

[Airport Travel Scams: Watch Out For These Airport Tricksters](#)

## ***7. Work-related holiday scams***

**The main scam:** Even in these economically-troubled times, many retailers and manufacturers need to take on extra staff to handle the Christmas rush. And since many of us are equally hard-pressed for cash, we're only too eager to find seasonal jobs.

Knowing this, spammers send out emails promising non-existent jobs for which, if you follow the ads up, you'll be asked to pay a commission or fee for the job. You may see similar ads in newspaper classifieds and even flyers or signs posted around town.

Even if the job exists, you may be conned into working for nothing -- with the promise of a generous payment at the end, which never comes -- or you could even find yourself caught up in some of the scams we've outlined here.

**How to avoid it:** Never pay for a job. Even legitimate agencies that earn their money by finding work earn their fees from employers not employees. Be wary if it's a "work now, get paid later" job -- check out the employer's credentials.

Also look out for bogus work-at-home jobs and learn about the [top 10 work-at-home scams](#), and providing your personal details to someone you don't know who says they'll employ you (they may be phishing).

We want you to have a great holiday season -- and not get taken by holiday scams. So, always be on your guard, pass on the tips we've given here to a couple of your friends and family members -- and enjoy a Happy Holiday!